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THE SEA IN THE MIRACLES OF ŠĪʿITE IMĀMS

According to the Šīʿite[1] faith imāms are endowed with certain abilities not given to ordinary mortals, among them the performance of miracles. Miracles are used as proof to convince those who would cast doubt on an imām's right to his title. The sea often provides the background for a miracle and may play a prominent role in its unfolding. It is to a description and analysis of this motif that the present article is dedicated. Two reasons have dictated the choice of the present topic.

First of all, the role of miracles in Šīʿite thought has received very little scholarly attention so far. In fact, we are aware of only three publications that have dealt with this subject from a number of different perspectives. Amir-Moezzi's paper provides a survey of miracles ascribed to Šīʿite imāms;[2] Etan Kohlberg's study focuses on miracles associated with imāms' vision;[3] and Judith Loebnstein deals specifically with the miracles attributed to the imām Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[4] But the reason why we have chosen the specific motif of the sea is the prominent role which it plays in many of the imāms' miracles.

This study is based on the following basic Šīʿite compositions:

1) *Baṣāʾir al-daraǧāt fī faḍāʾil Āl Muḥammad* by Abū Ǧaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Farūḫ al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī[5] (d. 290/903), a contemporary of the tenth Twelver Šīʿite imām ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Hādī (d. 254/868) and the eleventh imām, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874). This composition is of particular importance for the purposes of the present study because it contains Šīʿite traditions that go back to very early times.

2) *Al-Ḫarāʾiǧ wa ʾl-ǧarāʾiḥ* by Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwindī

1 – The terms "Šīʿite", "Šīʿism", and "Šīʿah" in the present paper refer to Twelver Šīʿism.

2 – M. A. Amir-Moezzi, "Savoir c'est pouvoir. Exégèses et implications du miracle dans l'imamisme ancien (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine V)", in: D. Aigle (éd.), *Miracle et karāma. Hagiographies médiévales comparées 2*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2000, p. 251-286.

3 – E. Kolhberg, "Vision and the Imams", in: *Vision d'Islam: Melanges islamologiques offerts a Daniel Gimaret*, Louvain-Paris, 2001, p. 125-157.

4 – J. Loebnstein, "Miracles in Shiʿi Thought: A Case-Study of the Miracles attributed to Imam Jaʿfar Al-Sadiq", *Arabica*, 50 (2003), p. 199-244.

5 – For details see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son *Kitāb Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*", *JA*, 280 (1992), p. 223-224.

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(d. 573/1177). This is a book which is dedicated exclusively to reporting the miracles performed by the imāms. Its author was the teacher of the scholar Ibn Shahrāšūb.

3) *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Šahrāšūb (d. 588/1192), a very well-known Šīʿite scholar in his day, who was respected in Sunnī circles as well. The book, a biographical chronicle of the Šīʿite imāms, relates also the miracles ascribed to them.

4) *Biḥār al-anwār* by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maǧlisī (d. 1110/1598), a resident of the city of Iṣfahān who devoted his life in collecting Šīʿite traditions. In the year 1686 the ruling Safavid governor appointed him to the position of Šayḫ al-Islām, which he utilized effectively for the purpose of advancing the cause of Twelver Šīʿism. His book *Biḥār al-anwār* contains traditions collected from numerous different sources dating from various time periods, among them the three above-mentioned books. This has the advantage that versions of traditions relating the same events can easily be compared.

In what follows the miracles associated with the sea have been classified into a number of different groups. The main criterion of classification is the miracle's main motif, in addition to the chronological order of the imāms to which they are attributed. In case a number of traditions relate the same miracle with no significant differences, most were relegated to the footnotes, if not ignored altogether.Below we shall describe and analyze those miracles attributed to the imāms in which the sea plays a crucial role, and attempt to answer the following questions:

- How does the imām perform the miracle?
- How is the sea depicted?
- What role does the vessel play?
- What is the imām's role in these miracles?
- What types of seas are mentioned in these miracles, and what is the function of each?
- What purpose did the composition of the stories about these miracles serve?

Before beginning our description and analysis of sea-related miracles, however, we shall provide a background discussion of the sea in world and Arab culture, in particular in the Qurʾān and its commentaries, as well as a short discourse on the significance of miracles among Šīʿites.

The sea in world and Arab culture

A. *The sea in world culture*

Studies on the sea in world literature usually deal with the literary output of peoples with a rich seafaring tradition. A major focus of such studies has been the sea associations of medieval poets and writers. Descriptions of the sea and of the fleets which traversed it abound in poems of the times, especially of seafaring peoples such as the English and the Norsemen, in whose lives the sea and maritime travel were an important element. Their poets, unsurprisingly, wrote descriptions of the seas, and compared their people's seafaring vessels to land animals, especially horses. Karin Olsen has dealt with the latter type of imagery in

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Old English and Old Norse poetry whose composers, as she noted in her article, were influenced by the social and cultural elements in their societies.[6] Lena B. Morton has dealt with the impact of the sea on English poetry from Anglo-Saxon times to the Romantic period. Her study focuses on two main aspects of sea poetry: realistic descriptions and legendary elements.[7] In Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka's *Analecta Husserliana: The Year Book of Phenomenological Research* an entire volume in whose writing thirty-five scholars participated is devoted to the sea and the maritime environment in the literatures of the world, and to the important role which the sea has played in the intellectual life of human societies.[8]

B. The sea in Arabic literature

In the last thirty years and more only a handful of articles have dealt with the subject of the sea in Arabic literature, which have laid the foundation for hopefully more comprehensive studies in future. These studies show the importance of the sea in Arabic and Islamic compositions, in literature, poetry, journey chronicles, geographical essays and more, thus demonstrating the Arabs' close mental and artistic ties to the sea in the Middle Ages. There are also some modern studies on Islamic maritime jurisprudence[9] and on the political history of Muslim maritime powers.

The sea as a theme in Arabic poetry has been dealt with in a variety of articles and in chapters of books on Arabic literature in general. Ḥusayn ʿAṭwān, in his *Wasf al-baḥr wa ʾl-nahr fī ʾl-šiʿr al-ʿarabī (Depictions of Sea and River in Arabic Poetry)*, attempted to refute the common opinion in Western scholarship that Arabic poetry did not contain depictions of seas and rivers. In the book's first two parts ʿAṭwān analyzes a group of pre-Islamic poems which he drew from a number of different sources. He concludes that these ancient Arab poets were well-acquainted with the sea and that their impressions of it appear in their works. This is a trend which was continued by the poets of the Umayyad period. In Part Three he deals with the maritime connections in the poetry of the early

6 – K. Olsen, "Animated Ships in Old English and Old Norse Poetry", in: *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature*, ed. by L.A.J.R. Houwen, Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1997, p. 53-66. Before the present era poets and other writers also wrote about the nature of the sea and about ships, and expressed their own feelings about the sea. They also used the imagery of land animals, especially horses. See Jens Braarvig's study of Old Indic and Vedic literature (c. 1000 BCE) and Greek mythology: J. Braarvig, "Horses and Ships in Vedic and Old Greek Material", *The Journal of Indo-European Studies,* 25 (1997), p. 345-351. For an account of ancient Jewish stories about the sea, see: R. Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 109-131.

7 – L.B. Morton, *The Influence of the Sea upon English Poetry from the Anglo-Saxon Period to the Victorian Period*, New York, Revisionist Press, 1976, vol. 3, p. 269.

8 – A.T. Tymieniecka (ed.), *Poetics of the Elements in the Human Condition: The Sea*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1985, p. xv, 507. The travails of sea journeys are described in stories worldwide; see: M. Wade Labarge, *Medieval Travellers*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1982, p. 30.

9 – H. S. Khalilieh, *Islamic Maritime Law*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1998.

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Abbasid period, where we find descriptions of river journeys to the object of the poet's praise, or a pleasure ride by the latter on a river, as a means for rejuvenating the parts of the classical *qaṣīdah* poem which immediately follow the Introduction. However, he points out that despite these efforts at originality in the end most poets continued to borrow their imagery for describing the vessels in their poems from the camels and horses which they were used to. Part Four, devoted to the poetry of the latter Abbasid period, shows no significant change in imagery. In his Epilogue ʿAṭwān discusses al-Buḥturī's introduction of a novel theme into Arabic poetry, namely descriptions of naval battles between the Arab and Byzantine naval forces.[10]

In his *Adab al-baḥr (Literature of the Sea)* Aḥmad ʿAṭiyyah devoted eight chapters and an Introduction to the theme of the sea in literature. In his Introduction he points out that the literature of the sea has its origins in an attempt to understand it, to discover its nature and meaning, and to utilize for the good of mankind. The human exploration of the oceans and seas and the attempts to understand them were accompanied by the emergence of a literature of the sea, which ʿAṭiyyah defines as "that literature whose purpose is to give expression to the world of the sea and in which the sea is the major theme that affects the events and characters. From a perspective of literature in general [...] the literature of the sea can take the form of legend, war tale, poem, folktale, sea-journey chronicle, short story or novel. In any of these forms legendary and real personalities can appear". But ʿAṭiyyah does not view the literature of the sea from just an esthetic point of view. He also sees its compositions as historical, geographical and social documents of scientific value. In Chapter One he provides an overall survey of the Arabs' associations with the sea, with a focus on the Arabs' commercial, cultural and religious activities connected with seas and oceans. Chapter Two is devoted to the sea in pre-Islamic poetry, the earliest examples of Arabic sea literature, which proves that the Arabs were familiar with the sea before the advent of Islam. In Chapter Three ʿAṭiyyah deals with sea stories, which he considers as the precursors of the stories about the sea which appear in the *Arabian Nights*. He also discusses the role played by Arab merchants in the emergence of these stories. In Chapter Four the author goes on to study the sea stories in the *Arabian Nights* itself, and the major role which the sea plays in these stories' events and in the lives of their characters, especially Sinbad the Sailor, whose sea travels constitute a prime example of the sea stories in the *Arabian Nights*. Chapter Five is devoted to the Arab seafarer Aḥmad b. Māǧid, author of *al-Muršidāt wa ʾl-fawāǧid al-baḥriyyah (Advice and Lessons of the Sea)*. Chapter Six deals with the seafaring literature written by Arabs, whose importance lies in the fact that it constitutes a major component of Arabic sea literature as a whole. In Chapter Seven ʿAṭiyyah discusses the sea in modern Arabic literature, while Chapter Eight is devoted to a survey of sea literature in the West.[11]

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10 – Ḥusayn ʿAṭwān, *Wasf al-baḥr wa ʾl-nahr fi ʾl-šiʿr al-ʿarabī min al-ʿaṣr al-ǧāhilī ilà ʾl-ʿaṣr al-ʿabbāsī al-ṯānī*, Amman, Dāʾirat al-Ṭaqāfah wa ʾl-Funūn, 1975.

11 – Aḥmad Muḥammad ʿAṭiyya, *Adab al-baḥr*, Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1978.

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The sea and its environment were a novel element in pre-Islamic poetry, added by the poets of the period to the desert scenes they described. The sea had an effect on both the form and the content of their poetry. Two main factors brought about the use of sea imagery in pre-Islamic poetry, one that some poets lived in the vicinity of sedentary peoples, and the other that poets also undertook sea journeys. Al-Mahdī, in his historical introduction to Arab acquaintance with sea life in pre-Islamic times, he points out that as a people of traders and merchants the Arabs had experience of the sea and knew quite a bit about it. Al-Mahdī also mentions the Qur'ānic verses in which the sea or sea-faring vessels are mentioned. After these introductory comments he goes into a detailed analysis of sea-related imagery in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Since, so he claims, this poetry constituted a registry of all aspects of Arab life in those days, he uses it to prove that the Arabs of the times were familiar with the sea. An image which readers of this poetry will often encounter is the ship as a metaphor for a woman's camel-borne sedan. The author also discusses a number of other sea-related themes containted in pre-Islamic poetry, for example sailors, maritime commerce, and the riches of the sea. Al-Mahdī points out that the riches of the sea were depicted with considerable care by pre-Islamic poets, especially pearl diving and fishing. The purpose of the article as a whole, according to the author's Introduction, is to refute the claim that the Arabs at the time in question had no contact with or knowledge of the sea. The evidence he brings comes from the Qur'ān, pre-Islamic poetry, and historical texts. He also demonstrates that when pre-Islamic poets write about the sea, it is not out of ignorance but with sure and precise knowledge.[12]

James E. Montgomery, in the fifth chapter of his *The Vagaries of the Qasidah: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry*, entitled "An Arab at Sea: A Poem by Bishr b. Abi Khazim al-Asadi", points out that the appearance of sea imagery in pre-Islamic poetry is surprising, and that readers usually expect it to contain rather allusions to nomadic life in the desert. Montgomery shows, using poetic texts by Bišr b. Abī Ḫāzim (sixth century CE) and others, that not only were the Arabs in pre-Islamic times quite familiar with the sea, but also, and more importantly, that these early poets utilized the theme of seafaring for expressing feelings such as longing for one's home and family. Montgomery thus refutes Lichtenstadter's mythological interpretation,[13] according to which the evocation of seafaring vessels has its roots in obscure ancient religious allusions.[14]

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12 – Qāsim Rāḍī Mahdī, "Maẓāhir al-bī'ah fī 'l-ši'r al-ǧāhilī", *al-Mawrid*, 10 (1981), p. 128-140.

13 – A view which she propounded in her paper "Origin and Interpretation of Some Qur'anic Symbols", in: *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956, vol. 1, p. 58-80.

14 – J.E. Montgomery, *The Vagaries of the Qasidah: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry*, Gibb Literary Studies, I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 166-208. For detail see Montgomery, *JAL*, 32 (2001), p. 84-85.

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The main thrust of all the afore-mentioned studies is literary; their main focus is on the tendency towards poetic innovation which appeared in the Abbasid period, and also on sea-related themes in poetry.

The sea in the Qurʾān and its commentaries

A number of Qurʾānic verses deal with sea-related activities, as well as with tales whose events occurred mainly on the seas, such as those of Noah, Jonah, Moses, and also with the sea on the Day of Resurrection.[15] According to the Qurʾān as interpreted in its commentaries the Arabs were well-acquainted with the sea and with seafaring vessels. Below we shall see whether Šīʿite writers followed the Qurʾānic model of the sea and sea vessels in their stories of sea-related miracles performed by Šīʿite imāms.

In addition to verses in which the sea in general is mentioned, the Qurʾān also contains five chapters *(sūrahs)* which speak of two specific seas.[16] However, the Qurʾān exegetes are not all in agreement as to the seas' geographical whereabouts, although everyone agrees that one of the two is very salty and bitter while the water of the second is sweet, that God put a barrier between the two after one of them imposed itself on the other, that the two do not mix, that the taste of their waters does not change, and that the water of the sweet sea does not spoil.[17]

The Qurʾān speaks of sea journeys and of seafarers and the dangers they

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15 – Q 7:163, 10:73, 11:37-44, 18:60-79, 23:27-29, 26:64, 119-120; 29:14-15, 37:139-144, 68:48-50. See also Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*; ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Šaḥātah, Cairo, al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-ʾl-Kitāb, 1988, vol. 2, p. 44, 70-71, 244, 281-283, 592-598; vol. 3, p. 155, 273, 377, 619, 620; vol. 4, p. 412; al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ğaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ğarīr, *Ğāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ṣidqī Ğ. al-ʿAṭṭār, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1995, vol. 9, p. 15, 338-343; vol. 16, p. 3-5; al-Suddī al-Kabīr, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-Kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAṭā Yūsuf, al-Manṣūrah, Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1993, p. 272, 336; ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsir ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, ed. Maḥmūd M. ʿAbduh, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1999, vol. 2, p. 343-338, 462.

16 – Q 18:60, 25:53, 27:61, 35:12, 55:19.

17 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 237, 314, 554; vol. 4, p. 197; al-Ṭabarī, *Ğāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 27, p. 166-169; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, vol. 3, p. 267; al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, ed. Muḥammad S. A. al-Zufaytī, Cairo, Dār al-Salām, 1999, vol. 2, p. 691; Q 25:53, 27:61, 35:12, 55:19-10. Pier Giovanni Donini discusses the debate among Arab geographers concerning the identity of the two seas which God separated: "It came to be assumed quite on that the 'two bodies' were the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, separated by the Suez isthmus. As time went on, Arab geographers and mapmakers turned this explanation into a sort of dogma, forgetting that according to the Qur'an (25:53, 35:12) in one of the 'two bodies' the water is 'palatable, sweet, and pleasant to drink', while in the other it is 'salt and bitter'. Bearing in mind that, in both cases, the freshwater sea is called *Furāt*, and that the word *baḥr* is commonly used in Arabic to indicate a big river as well as the sea, it was suggested that the reference in the Qur'an might be to the Euphrates river and the Persian Gulf, although there is no obvious "barrier" to stop the waters of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab from joining the sea". See P. G. Donini, *Arab Travelers and Geographers*, London, Immel Publishing, 1991, p. 15-16.

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face; these are perceived as trials brought upon mankind to test their patience and their faith in their Creator.[18] The verses and the commentaries speak of two sources of danger to which seafarers and seagoing vessels are exposed. One of these is the aggression of man against man, which is a source of iniquity on land as well as on sea. Sin on the seas is the result of man's attempts to put his hands on what God has forbidden, by attacking other ships.[19] Then there is the marine environment, which contributes to the dangers of travelers at sea. Among the dangerous elements to be found in this environment are fog, darkness, waves, high winds, and sea animals. Thus, for example, darkness can make travelers on the sea lose their way; the water can be so dark that if one puts one's hands in it it will become unseen.[20] As a result of such dangers travelers were acutely afraid of drowning at sea.[21]

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18 – H. Ringgren, "The Concept of Ṣabr in Pre-Islamic Poetry and in the Qur'an", *IC* 26 (1952), p. 75, 83-85.

19 – Al-Suddī al-Kabīr, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-Kabīr*, p. 380; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 21, p. 58-60; Q 30:41. The two words *fasād* ("corruption") and *baḥr* ("sea") in the latter verse ("corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought") have given rise to numerous interpretations. The word "corruption" is has been taken to stand for any number of evils: sins, ruin, famine, drought, death, wrongful destruction, corruption in the narrow sense, and sorcery. See: Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Dāmaghānī, *al-Wuǧūh wa ʾl-naẓāʾir*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥ. Abū al-ʿAzm al-Zufaytī, Cairo, Lağnat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṯ, 1995, vol. 2, p. 114-116. As far as the word "sea" mentioned in the verse is concerned, exegetes have understood it as referring to various specific locations, such as cities and towns, but also to the sea in the usual meaning. See al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, vol. 2, p. 663-664. Al-Qummī is of the opinion that "corruption on land" refers to "the extinction of animals if it does not (rain), and the death of the beasts of the sea due to the same. Al-Ṣādiq, may peace be upon him, has said: the lives of the beasts of the sea (depend) on rain, and if it does not rain then corruption appears on both land and sea; this happens whenever wrongs and sins proliferate". Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1991, vol. 2, p. 137.

20 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 18, p. 200-201; vol. 20, p. 7; Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 565; vol. 3, p. 202; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, vol. 2, p. 444; Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, ed. Balḥāǧǧ b. Saʿīd Šarīfī, Beirut, Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1990, vol. 1, p.532-533; vol. 2, p. 188; vol. 3, p. 185; Q 27:63, 24:40, 10:22. The Imām Muḥammad al-Rāzī (544-604 / 1149-1207) wrote that "the darkness of land and sea is a metaphor for the frightful things which are to be found in both. In the darkness of the sea are combined the darkness of night, of the sea itself, and of the clouds, to which are added thick clouds and terrible waves". Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 13, p. 22-23. Muqātil b. Sulaymān relates that "the sea is darker the deeper its water [...]": *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 202.

21 – Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 21, p. 10-11; Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 234-235, 540-541; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 11, p. 131; vol. 15, p. 154; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, 2:305, 463; al-Saddī al-Kabīr, *Tafsīr al-Saddī al-Kabīr*, p. 395, 405; Hūd al-Hawārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, vol. 3, p. 312; vol. 4, p. 101; Q 10:22, 17:66-67, 36:44. Al-Rāzī orders the terrors of the sea on an increasing scale, and states how each affects the travelers' mental state: "Know that if a man journeys on a ship and finds that the wind is good and fit for proceeding properly, he will be very happy. But then the signs of

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For this reason men in fear of drowning call on God to save them from the terrors of the sea.[22] At the same time, the Qurʾān also points out that men use the stars for guidance and for knowing what course to take; in fact, the Creator made the stars for the express purpose of helping travelers find their way.[23]

The Qurʾān also mentions seafaring vessels, which hold an exalted position due to the fact that they are considered one of God's signs in the universe,[24] although they are made by men. The wind in this connection is mentioned in the Qurʾān in the context of God sending wind to make ships able to make headway in the sea. This is an obvious allusion to sailships, which in the absence of wind are doomed to remain in place on the water. The Qurʾān's exegetes understood these comments to mean that God himself causes these parts of the boat to move, although the parts themselves are not mentioned.[25] On the other hand, the Qurʾān compares ships to the mountains on land; perhaps it was the great size of some ships which wrought this comparison, mentioned in the following verse: "And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas" (Q 55:24).

The Qurʾān also explains the purpose for the purchase of ships, namely to make a living by undertaking commercial sea journeys to different lands and moving goods from one land to another.[26] As a result some exegetes have ex-

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ruin will suddenly appear, the first being strong stormy winds and the second huge waves from all sides. The third is that their minds will be overcome with thoughts of imminent destructions, and the unlikelihood of their being saved. Such a sudden change from agreeable to dangerous circumstances can arouse great fear, and the sight of the sea's fearsome attributes are likely to enhance one's terror. In such a situation a man's sole wish will be to hope for God's grace and mercy, and will not wish to rely on anyone in creation". See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 17, p. 70-71.

22 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 565; vol. 2, p. 234-235; vol. 3, p. 389-390, 439; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 11, p. 131; vol. 15, p. 154; vol. 21, p. 101-102; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, 2:305; Hūd al-Hawārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, vol. 2, p. 432; vol. 3, p. 341; Q 29:65-66, 31:31-32, 10:22, 17:66-69. Al-Rāzī explains: "When all these sources of terror come together a person can only turn to God Almighty [...] When such catastrophes occur a person is driven to a number of things: one, prayer; two, supplication; three, sincere devotion [...]; and four, thankful devotion". See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 13, p. 22-23.

23 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 580; vol. 2, p. 234-235; Hūd al-Hawārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, 1:547, 3:261; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 372; vol. 11, p. 131; P. G. Donini, *Arab Travelers and Geographers*, p. 15; Q 6:97, 10:22.

24 – I. Lichtenstadter, "Origin and Interpretation of Some Qur'anic Symbols", p. 70.

25 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 418, 439, 771-772; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 17, p. 70-71; al-Suddī al-Kabīr, *Tafsīr al-Suddī al-Kabīr*, p. 432-433. Al-Ṭabarī relates the following tradition: "Bišr told us: Yazīd told us: Saʿīd told us in the name of Qatādah, that He said: "And among His signs are the ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas" (Q 42:32), meaning that ships run with the wind, and if the wind ceases they stand in place". See al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 25, p. 43-45; Q 30:46, 31:31-32.

26 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 136, 154, 418, 554, 836-837; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 15, p. 153; vol. 17, p. 258; vol. 25, p. 186; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol.

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plained that just ships at sea are an abode for men, like the land, and a means for disseminating human activity on earth.[27] The Qurʾān speaks not only of the sea itself and the vessels on it, but also about the benefits it bestows. According to the Qurʾān these are two: the sea is a source of nourishment to mankind, and some of its products are fit to be used for decoration,[28] for example pearls and corals.[29]

But in conclusion we must remember that the Qurʾān, although it mentions the sea quite frequently, is not a guide to seamanship; its main purpose, after all, is to present Islam's main theological principle, the oneness of God.[30] Consequently, the sea and all it contains are perceived as having been created by God for the service of mankind. The latter will therefore worship God, who has bent the sea to the service of man and who saves man from its dangers.

As the reader will have noted, no study of the sea in Islam has treated the subject in light of the miracles attributed to the Šīʿite imāms. This is thus the next topic to be treated here.

The miracles of Twelver Šīʿite imāms

According to the Šīʿite creed it is not only prophets who perform miracles, but imāms as well.[31] Al-Šayḫ al-Mufīd[32] says on this subject: "The appearance of

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21, p. 10-11; Hūd al-Hawārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, vol. 2, p. 431; vol., 3:329, 414, 4:137; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, vol. 2, p. 266; al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, vol. 1, p. 515; Q 14:32, 22:65, 23:22, 45:12.

27 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 542; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 15, p. 157; Q 17:70.

28 – Al-Rāzī in his commentary explains: " 'And He knows all that is on land and in the sea' (Q 6:59), since one of the compartments of the knowledge of God is all the beasts of the land and the sea. [...] And as for the sea, although the mind comprehends it less, the senses indicate that the wonders of the seas in all are more, and their extent greater, and the animals and creatures in them are more wonderous". See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Faḫr al-Rāzī*, vol. 13, p. 11.

29 – Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 153; vol. 3, p. 439; al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 68; ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Furāt al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Qumm, Muʾassasat Dār al-Kitāb, 1982[3], vol. 1, p. 385.

30 – M. Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1999, p. 36; F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chicago, Minneapolis, 1980, p. 66, 78-79.

31 – In contradistinction to the Sunnī creed, which only recognizes miracles performed by prophets; in fact, it considers the performance of a miracle to constitute proof of prophetic powers. According to the Sunna a miracle is an act which exceeds the bounds of natural law, and which no mere mortal can perform. For more details see: J.M. McDermott, *The Theology of Al-Shaikh Al-Mufid*, Beirut, Dar al-Mashriq, 1978, p. 85. Only a true prophet can perform a miracle, and only a miracle can prove someone to be a prophet; see R. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes, Theologien und Erschelinungsforment des islamischen Heiligenwunders*, Freiburger Islamstudien XI, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1987, p. 52-53. The purpose of the miracle *(muʿǧizah)* is to convince others that someone is indeed a prophet, in contradistinction to a lesser wonder *(karāmah)*, which serves to enhance the position of the person to whom it was given to perform. See Gramlich, *Die Wunder*, p. 43; miracles are also important for prophets who need them to stand up to their enemies (p. 52).

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miracles peformed by imāms is possible from a rational perspective, and numerous traditions and texts demonstrate corroborate them".

Among Twelver Šīʿites the ability of imāms to perform miracles is general accepted, with the exception of the Banū Nawbaḫt[33] and the Muʿtazilites, both of whom rejected the idea.[34]

But miracles have not been attributed solely to prophets. Some proverbial other examples were the mother of Moses and Maryam bint ʿImrān. Moses' mother had a revelation,[35] which is a miracle in and of itself. Maryam bint ʿImrān was sustained by God after she shook the trunk of a dry date palm,[36] also a miracle.[37] In the Sunnī view, however, what happened to Maryam is considered a lesser wonder (*karāmah* or *irhāṣ*[38]) and not an actual miracle.

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32 – An important scholar of his times, born in Iraq in 336/948 or 338/950 and died in Baghdad in 413/1022. He was a student of Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī and of a number of Muʿtazilite scholars, and took part in the development of the science of rhetoric among Šīʿites. Al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Šarīf al-Raḍī and Abū Ǧaʿfar al-Ṭūsī were among his teachers. For more on him see M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿism: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shīʿism*, New Haven and London, 1985, p. 317.

33 – Among the most famous members of the Banū Nawbaḫt family were Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī Abū Sahl al-Nawbaḫtī and his grandson al-Ḥasan b. Mūsà Abū Aḥmad al-Nawbaḫtī, both of whom did not accept the idea that imāms were capable of performing miracles. Both did however agree that Šīʿite imāms were infallible. For more on them see *EI²*, *s.v.* «Al-Nawbakhtī» (J. L. Kraemer), vol. 12, p. 1044. The Banū Nawbaḫt were Twelver Šīʿites, but had only a marginal influence on the Šīʿite creed. On the other hand, one Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Nawbaḫt composed a book entitled *al-Yāqūt fī ʿilm al-kalām* in which he admits the possibility that an imām may be capable of performing a miracle, in which context he mentions the affair of Āṣaf b. Baraḫiyyah and Maryam bint ʿImrān. For more details see the commentary on this book by Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf, entitled *Anwār al-malakūt fī šarḥ al-yāqūt*, ed. Muḥammad N. Zanǧānī, Teheran, Šāmḫānī Dannišah, 1338/1959, p. 186. However, this is a relatively late book and does not represent the trend of which al-Šayḫ al-Mufīd speaks when referring to the Banū Nawbaḫt. For more details see Āǧā Buzurk al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Ḏarīʿah ilā taṣānīf al-šīʿah*, Naǧaf, 1936-8, vol. 2, p. 444-445; vol. 25, p. 271-272; Madelung is of the opinion that the work in question was written by Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Nawbaḫt, of whose life no details are known, and that it was composed some one-hundred years after 914 CE, which is the date that ʿAbbās Iqbāl gives for its publication. For more details see: W. Madelung, "Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology", in: *Le Shīʿisme Imamite* (Colloque de Strasbourg, 1968), Paris, 1970, p. 15.

34 – Except for Ibn al-Iḫšīd (see S. Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī*, Berlin, Laus Scharz, 1991, p. 195) and also Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (see al-Mufīd, *Awāʾil al-maqālāt fī al-maḏāhib waʾl-muḫtārāt*, Tabrīz, 1951, p. 40-41; Gramlich, *Die Wunder*, p. 98; Schmidtke, *The Theology*, p. 160). Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī is Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Ṭayyib, a Muʿtazilite imām of the Basra school (d. 436/1044). For more details on him see *EIr*, "Abu ʾl Ḥoseyn Baṣrī" (D. Gimaret), vol. I, p. 322-324.

35 – See Q 28:7.

36 – Q 19:25; see also *EI²*, *s.v.* «Maryam» (A.J. Wensinck, P. Johnstone), vol. 6, p. 631.

37 – ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, *Kašf al-murād fī šarḥ taǧrīd al-iʿtiqād*, Beirut, 1408/1988, p. 276.

38 – The term *irhāṣ* refers to a miracle performed by a prophet before being made aware of his prophetic calling; see Gramlich, *Die Wunder*, p. 109.

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Al-Ḥalabī[39] says that "a miracle performed by an imām constitutes proof of his status as imām". He adds: "Miracles are not performed only by prophets", giving as an example Solomon's trustee Āṣaf b. Baraḫiyyah, who performed miracles although he was not a prophet. The miracles of the imāms, he explains, are related to their claim to the imāmate.[40]

The Šīʿite scholar al-Ḥillī in his *Kašf al-murād fī šarḥ tağrīd al-iʿtiqād* refutes the arguments put forth by the opponents of the Šīʿite claim that their imāms perform miracles. He mentions the same figures mentioned above, who were not prophets and yet had miracles ascribed to them. He also adds that in his opinion what uniquely characterizes the prophets is not the fact that they perform miracles but rather their prophetic calling, which accompanies their miracles.[41] A non-prophet may thus be able to perform a miracle just like a prophet, but this does not of course mean that such a person is also like a prophet in other respects.[42]

The Sunnī view is that miracles constitute proof of prophetic powers, and that anyone who performs a miracle is perforce a prophet. According to the Shīʿītes the imāms are not prophets; they do not cast doubt on the Prophet Muḥammad's status as the Seal of the Prophets.[43] They add, however, that the performance of miracles is not limited to prophets alone. Rather, miracles can also be performed by imāms because a miracle does not constitute evidence for prophetic ability, but for any true claim. Consequently, miracles performed by the imāms constitute proof of their imāmate, without this fact detracting in any way from the superior status of the prophets.

To denote the extraordinary deeds of their imāms the Šīʿites use the term "miracle" *(muʿğizah)*, and not the term for a lesser wonder, *karāmah*. The latter word isused only rarely by Šīʿite writers when they discuss miracles.[44] In fact, the Šīʿites miss no opportunity to compare the prophets and the imāms in this respect.

The Sunnī distinction between *muʿğizah* and *karāmah* is rejected by the Šīʿites. According to the Sunnī belief whatever miraculous deeds are performed by imāms should be considered *karāmah*s, while the Šīʿites insist that they are *muʿğizah*s in the full sense of the word, i.e. full miracles performed in public, not hidden from view as are *karāmah*s.[45]

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39 – Abū Ṣāliḥ Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī died in Aleppo in 447/1055-6. He studied with al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā and Abū Ğaʿfar al-Ṭūsī. See al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Ḏarīʿah*, vol. 17, p. 247.

40 – Abū Ğaʿfar M. b. Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Teheran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1946[4], p. 100.

41 – Al-Ḥillī, *Kašf al-murād*, p. 276, taken from Gramlich, *Die Wunder*, p. 109-110.

42 – Ibid., p. 277, taken from Gramlich, *Die Wunder*, p. 110.

43 – M.M. Bar Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shīʿism*, Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999, p. 140-141.

44 – Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, p. 91.

45 – Although there is some inter-Šīʿite debate on whether the imāms' miracles should be

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How imāms conjure the sea

According to the traditions on which the present study is based, the evocation of the sea by an imām is accompanied by the act of striking the ground with the leg. Striking the ground with the leg as a preparatory act prior to the performance of a miracle was not an innovation of the imāms, nor were they the only ones to have done so. For example, the angel Gabriel is reported to have struck the ground on a number of occasions, one of which caused five rivers to burst out of the earth, the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Nile, the Mihrān and the Balkh.[46]

On another occasion on which Gabriel struck the ground with his foot he caused water to come out for Joseph.[47] The angel also struck the ground with his foot when he revealed himself to the Prophet Muḥammad for the first time; then, too, a spring appeared and the two of them used the water for ritual ablutions.[48]

The following prophets are reported to have struck the ground with their feet in preparation for the performance of a miracle: Job after he had been stricken with thirst was told by God in a revelation: "Strike (the ground) with your foot",[49] whereupon water sprung out of the ground before him;[50] David[51] struck the ground with his foot, whereupon the sea split and the whales were revealed;[52] Ishmael[53] as a child in the company of his father Abraham[54] in Mecca was thirsty, whereupon he struck the ground with his foot and the Zam-

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made public, in view of the Šīʿite policy of "dissimulation" *(taqiyyah)*.

46 – For more details see al-Ṣadūq, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh, *al-Ḫiṣāl*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1982, vol. 1, p. 291, no. 54; idem, *Man lā yaḥḍiruhu al-faqīh*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1993[3], vol. 2, p. 45, no. 2663; ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, *Fiqh al-Riḍā*, Mashhad, al-Muʾtamar al-ʿālamī li-ʾl-imām al-Riḍā, 1985, p. 293, no. 49; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 409, no. 8; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-šīʿah*, vol. 9, p. 530, no. 12642.

47 – Muḥammad b. Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāšī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāšī*, ed. Hāšim al-Maḥallātī, Teheran, al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1960, vol. 1, p. 177, no. 27; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, 1984, vol. 12, p. 302-303, no. 103.

48 – Raḍī al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Mūsà b. Ṭāwūs, *Saʿd al-suʿūd*, Qumm, Dār al-Ḏaḫāʾir, 1949, p. 215; Q 38:42.

49 – Q 38:42.

50 – Niʿmat Allāh al-Ǧazāʾirī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, Qumm, Āyat Allāh al-Marʿašī al-Naǧafī, 1983, p. 198, 200, 206-207; ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Hibat Allāh Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ nahǧ al-balāġah*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1967, vol. 19, p. 133; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, p. 241; al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *Iršād al-qulūb*, Qumm, Dār al-Šarīf al-Raḍī, 1991, vol. 1, p. 128 (commentary on the verse: "Strike [the ground] with thy foot: here is cool water to wash with and to drink").

51 – For details on him see R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, London, Curzon Press, 2002, p.35-38.

52 – Rašīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Šahrāšūb al-Māzandarānī, *Mutašābih al-Qurʾān*, Teheran, Dār Baydār li-ʾl-Našr, 1949, vol. 1, p. 58.

53 – For details see *EI*[2], *s.v.* «Ismāʿīl» (R. Paret), vol. 4, 1990, p. 184-185.

54 – For details see *EI*[2], *s.v.* «Ibrāhīm» (R. Paret), vol. 2, 1986, p. 431-432.

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zam spring burst forth.[55]

This was not the only means used by imāms to evoke the sea. It is related, for example, that an imām would draw a bandage across the eye or eyes of those present. Then he would call and the miracle would happen. At other times the imām would stroke the eye of the present person, who would then immediately be presented with a vision of the sea.

Such well-known acts were associated with the imāms' piercing vision;[56] according to Šīʿite belief an imām can see beyond the natural world and perceive things which are hidden to ordinary mortals, whenther they be in the sky, on the earth, in Heaven or in Hell. These characteristics tend to convince doubters to recognize the imām's right to his post, and the truth of the Šīʿite creed.

A number of Šīʿite imāms are reported to have struck the ground with their leg before performing a miracle. Thus, for example, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib did so on a number of occasions. Once a spring of water burst forth after he struck the ground with his leg, and he and his companions performed the ritual ablutions and prayed.[57] Another time he struck the ground with his foot and a pulpit made of rubies came out of the earth, whereupon he ascended it and gave a sermon. Yet another time he caused the earth to quake by striking the ground with his foot.[58] Once he also stopped an earthquake by striking the ground with his foot. He is also said to have resurrected a dead person by striking the ground with his foot.

Of the imām al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (d. 661 CE) it is related that when in al-Madīnah he once struck his tend with his foot, whereupon he was immediately transported to al-Kūfah.[59]

Of the imām Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765 CE) it is said that he struck the ground with his foot a number of times. One of these occasions was when he wanted to show the pool of Paradise to Ibn Sinān;[60] another time he struck the ground with his foot and out came gold in the shape of a camel's neck;[61] on a third oc-

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55 – Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 202, no. 2; al-Ǧazā'irī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 110, no. 107; al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 12, p. 106, no. 19; al-Ṣadūq (Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawyh al-Qummī), *ʿIlal al-šarāǧiʿ*, Qumm, Maktabat al-Dāwirī, n.d., vol. 2, p. 432, no. 1; Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī, *al-Ḫarā'iǧ wa-'l-ǧarā'iḥ*, Qumm, Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 1988, vol. 2, p. 928.

56 – For details on this topic see: E. Kohlberg, "Vision and the Imams", p. 125-157.

57 – Abū Ǧaʿfar al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, Qumm, Dār al-Ṯaqāfah li-'l-Našr, 1994, p. 200, no. 340-43; Rašīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Šahrāšūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, Qumm, Mu'assasat al-ʿAllāmah li-'l-Našr, 1960, vol. 2, p. 324, 337; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Saʿd al-suʿūd*, p. 113.

58 – Šaraf al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhirah fī faḍl al-ʿitrah al-ṭāhirah*, Qumm, Mu'assasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1988, p. 805-806, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 25, p. 379, no. 30.

59 – Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ǧarīr b. Rustum al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-imāmah*, Naǧaf, al-Maṭbaʿah al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1963, p. 65.

60 – Al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 25, p. 381, no. 35.

61 – Al-Mufīd, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān al-ʿUkbarī, *al-Iḫtiṣāṣ*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar

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casion he struck a dead woman with his foot and brought her to life;[62] and yet another time he struck the trunk of a dessicated date palm, whereupon it revived and yielded thrity-two different kinds of fresh dates.[63]

The imām's miracle boat

According to Šīʿite belief, when an imām felt that his authority was questioned he would perform a miracle in order to convince the doubters. He would evoke a boat which he would ride together with the doubters. On this miracle boat ride there were no worldly boundaries. Not only the imām himself would be free of the shackles which usually bind mortals to this earth, but he was able to free his companions, too, of their human limitations. On this boatride he would anchor in Paradise, on the shores of islands where domes and tents awaited the imāms.

Šīʿite sources relate that the imām's boat had no captain; it set off immediately at the imām's command: "Go forth with God's blessing", and sailed between mountains of sapphire. It knew what course to take without having to be directed by its passengers. It's speed was very great, and no obstacle could stand in its way. Its passengers felt no insecurity or fear, and the sea was always calm throughout the journey. The boat would arrive in Paradise in the blink of an eye. The moment the boat set off material time came to a stop and a sacred time began, a time not of this world. When the imām arrived the face of history changed. He was not a mortal denizen of the earth but a cosmic, unbounded being, whom the boat obeyed. He moved freely outside the bounds of this world and granted the same freedom of movement also to his fellow travelers. The imām would arrive with his companions in Paradise, where they would be met by the spirits of the Prophet Muḥammad, his dauther Fāṭimah, and the other imāms, who would be resurrected for a moment in order to welcome the visiting imām. The gates of Paradise would be open and strange unreal shapes would be seen through them, such as the domes in which the imāms resided in Heaven.[64]

Not only is the imām superior to the rest of mankind, his boat, too, is of a superior kind. It is made of silver and rubies, with a white pearl in the middle, a befits a vessel in the service of an imām who miraculously brought it forth and sailed the sea on it with his companions. The boat flies a green flag on which the following words are written: "There is no God but Allāh, Muḥammad is the

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al-Ġaffārī, Qumm, The teaching staff at the *ḥawzah* of Qumm, 1992, p. 272; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Farrūḫ al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-daraǧāt*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥsin Kūtchebāghī al-Tabrīzī, Qumm, Maktabat āyat Allāh al-Marʿašī, 1983², p. 376, no. 5; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-a'immah*, p. 100.

62 – Al-Rāwandī, *al-Ḫarā'iǧ wa 'l-ǧarā'iḥ*, vol. 1, p. 294; al-Nabbāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 2, p. 185, no. 1; ʿAlī b. ʿĪsà al-Irbillī, *Kašf al-ġummah fī maʿrifat al-a'immah*, ed. Hāšim al-Rasūlī, Tabriz, Maktabat Banī Hāšmī, 1961, vol. 2, p. 199; ʿAlī b. Mūsà b. Ǧaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Ṭāwūs, *Faraǧ al-maḥmūm fī tāriḫ ʿulamā' al-nuǧūm*, Qumm, Dār al-Ḏaḫā'ir, 1948, p. 230.

63 – Ibn Šahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 4, p. 214.

64 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-imāmah*, p. 142.

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Messenger of Allāh, the 'the resurrected one' will kill the enemies". Šīʿite authors may have taken the flag's green color from the green color worn by the inhabitants of Paradise and the council of believers there,[65] or perhaps because this color symbolizes fertility and life's continuation.[66] The inscription on the flag has a distinctly Šīʿite flavor. In addition to the declaration about God's oneness it contains a reference to the second coming of the twelfth imām, Muḥammad b. al-Mahdī, whose occultation took place in the year 878 CE. He is called "*al-qāǧim*" or "the resurrected one"; his second coming to take revenge on the enemies of Shīʿism is an article of Šīʿite faith. The boat which the imām has so miraculously summoned proves to Šīʿite believers that the Mahdī ("the rightfully guided one") will indeed return.

The story as a whole is clearly intended to stress the legitimcacy of the Šīʿite creed and especially the idea of the Mahdī's return.

The imām's boat and the Prophet's mount al-Burāq

The miracle performed by the imām, of evoking the boat and traveling to Heaven, has some rather striking similarities to the story of al-Burāq,[67] the beast which the Prophet rode on his midnight journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. Šīʿite writers clearly adopted features of the Prophet's mount when depicting the imām's boat: both have remarkable forms, perform remarkably, convey their respective passengers very rapidly, come to their destinations in no time, and are covered with gems and pearls. Al-Burāq was the speedy mount which conveyed the Prophet Moḥammad, and all the other prophets before him,[68] while the boat conveyed the imāms speedily from earth to Heaven.

It appears that Šīʿite writers were influenced by the reports concerning al-Burāq as the speedy mount of the prophets, and thus invented a similar means of transport for their imāms. Th e choice of a boat goes to show that God provided the imāms with transport to Heaven comparable to that which he gave the prophets.

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65 – Q 55:54, 76:21, 18:31.

66 – Muḥammad Qarāniyā, "Ẓāhirat al-lawn fī 'l-Qur'ān al-karīm", *al-Turāṯ al-ʿarabī*, 70 (1988), URL: www.awu-dam.org/trath/70/turath70-08.htm

67 – For details on al-Burāq see *EI*², *s.v.* «Burāḳ» (B. Carra de Vaux - R. Paret), vol. 1, 1986, p. 1310-1311; ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Ibn Kaṯīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Cairo, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, n.d., vol. 3, p. 11. Al-Burāq possesses a rich metaphorical imagery. Its name is derived from an Arabic root indicating light, brilliance and lightning, perhaps in an allusion to its great speed. In the stories of the Prophet's midnight journey it is described as a strange mixture of features, as an animal with a human face covered by gems and pearls, and as a carved sculpture. See: J.E. Bencheikh, *Le Voyage nocturne de Mahomet*, Paris, Impr. nationale, 1988, p. 253.

68 – According to tradition all the prophets, beginning with Adam, rode al-Burāq, including Abraham on his journey from Damascus to Mecca, when he discovered the site of the "ancient house" for the first time. For more details see, for example, Ibn Kaṯīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, vol. 3, p. 11.

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The boat's passengers

In most accounts the imām is accompanied by four other passengers[69] on his boat journey, on the orders of the imām ʿAlī. They sit on golden chairs made for them expressly and bear witness to the miracle performed by the imām, to dispel doubts as to the imām's abilities, expressed by them or others. After the journey the passengers disseminate the news of the miracle. The passengers are mentioned by name, apparently out of a desire to increase the story's credibility among the believers.

The imām's arrival in Paradise

When the imām's boat arrives in Paradise the imām ceases to be a historical personality. He becomes a cosmic being with no limits. His passengers are terrified when at sea and fear that they will drown, but the boat submits to his orders.

The imām's maritime journey lays the ground for his journey in Paradise, where he is presented to the imāms who have already passed away and gone to Heaven. The dwellers of Paradise recognize his position as imām. His fellow imāms greet him; he becomes master of the future and conqueror of the past. He is also shown the tent where he will dwell after his death.

The function of the imām's sea journey is not just a preparation for the journey to Paradise; it also serves to made death palatable to his mortal companions, by making them overcome their fears. All the events during the journey take place outside of material time. As soon as the imām arrives in Paradise sacred time begins and all contact with the material world is cut off. This miraculous journey constitutes proof of the imām's powers since, so the believers maintain, he easily travels to Paradise and shows his companions the place in Heaven where the imāms dwell, on the most beautiful islands there.

The sea's features in the imāms' miracles

Šīʿite writers do not provide elaborate details of the sea which the imām evokes and which he traverses on his way to Paradise. At most it is described only briefly. This is no doubt due to the fact that the significance of the sea is purely religious and theological, and its technical characteristics are unimportant. After all, the imām's sole objective is to reach Heaven and the imāms' island as quickly as possible, in order to put his doubters' objections to rest.

At any rate, the sea in question is calm, and those sailing on it are not exposed to any danger. Nor does it have other features of natural seas, such as waves, tides, the need to row through the water, etc.

The color of the water is white; whiter, in fact, than milk, and sweeter than honey.[70] The sea in these tales of miracles serves as a background for the events;

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69 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p.142.

70 – Šīʿite writers may have chosen to borrow features of the Kawṯar river of Paradise in their depictions of the sea; that river is said to be whiter than milk. See Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*, Qumm, Dār al-Šarīf al-Raḍī, 1966, vol. 2, p. 501; al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍāʾil al-*

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it is both real and legendary at one-and-the-same time, as it begins in this world and ends in Paradise. The sea's depiction, too, consists of realistic and fantastic features; among the realistic features are the floating boat, the shores, the islands, the embarkation, and more; among the fantastic features we may cound the fact that the sea connects the earth with Paradise, the boat which runs on the imām's orders, and the journey which takes no time.

The riches of the sea

The imām controls the riches of the sea, its fish and its hidden treasures. He knows precisely where to find them and can summon them whenever he likes. He is all-seeing; his total vision, a gift from God, enables him to see things that are hidden from the eyes of mere mortals. He is said to cause the following treasures to appear:

A. *Pearls, rubies, musk and ambergris*

On his sea journey to Paradise the imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have stretched his arm to the bottom of the sea, taken out pearls and rubies, and addressed one of his companions, Dāwūd b. Katīr al-Raqqī as follows: "If you want this world then take these pearls and rubies". Dāwūd replied that he had no desire for this world, whereupon the imām cast them back into the sea.[71]

On the same occasion the imām stretched his hand to the bottom of the sea again, and this time brought out a handful of sand which turned into musk and ambergris in his hand. He smelled them and let his companions smell them, too, and then cast them back into the sea.[72]

B. *Fish in sea-related miracles performed by the imāms*

On a number of occasions imāms are said to have raised fish as part of a miracle. The imām al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī[73] (d. 669 CE) is said to have performed the following miracle in the presence of a man called Ǧābir.[74] He struck the ground with his foot and summoned seas on which ships voyaged. He took some fish out of the sea and gave them to Ǧābir. Ǧābir and his son carried away the fish, which were numerous, and he and his family ate of them for three days.

In this miracle the species of fish is not specified. At any rate, the description of the sea is realistic, with vessels and fish. The purpose of the miracle is to dem-

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Šīʿah, Teheran, Dār al-Aʿlamī li-ʾl-Našr, n.d., p. 36-37, no. 36; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḫālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, Qumm, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1951², vol. 1, p. 180, no. 172; ʿAlī b. Ṭāwūs al-Ḥillī, *al-Yāqīn*, Qumm, Muʾassasat Dār al-Kitāb, 1413 AH, p. 291; al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, p.16; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 141.

71 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 141.

72 – Ibid.

73 – The second imām, after ʿAlī. For more details see *EI²*, *s.v.* «al-Ḥasan b. Alī b. Abī Ṭālib» (L. Veccia Vaglieri), vol. 3, 1986, p. 607-615.

74 – I have been unable to discover the identity of this person, since only his first name is mentioned.

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onstrate the imām's supernatural abilities.

C. *Nūn the whale*

In a reported dialogue between the imām ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn[75] (d. 713 CE) and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb (d. 692) the latter is said to have addressed the imām as follows: "You claim that Yūnus (Jonah) b. Mannā[76] was asked to accept the your father's [i.e., ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib] right of succession *(wilāyah)* and he refused, whereupon he was imprisoned in the belly of a whale". The imām perceived ʿAbd Allāh's incredulity and therefore asked Muḥammad b. Ṯābit[77] to blindfold himself and ʿAbd Allāh. After this was done ʿAlī uttered a call and then asked those present to remove their blindfolds. They discovered that they were sitting on a rug at the sea shore. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn then spoke, and was answered by a number of whales. One of the whales was very large, and the imām asked it for its name. It answered: "My name is Nūn". ʿAlī asked the whale why Yūnus had been imprisoned in its belly and it answered: "He was told to accept your father's right of succession but refused, and therefore he was imprisoned in my belly. But after he conceded and accepted it, I was given an order [by God] and emitted him".

In this miracle the fish is a huge whale named Nūn, which speaks to the imām. This is not unusual in Šīʿite lore: the imām is considered able to speak the language of all creatures.[78] In addition, the whale obeys the imām, appears on his call and answers his questions.

From the Šīʿite perspective, the truth of this tale would constitute proof of the antiquity of the Šīʿite belief in the authority of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Indeed, it demonstrates, in the Šīʿite view, that the roots of Shīʿism go back many thousands of years,[79] at least since the days of Yūnus who, had he not relented and

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75 – The fourth imām in Twelver Shīʿism. For details see *EI*², *s.v.* ««Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn» (E. Kohlberg), vol. 11, 2002, p. 481-483.

76 – For details see *EI*², *s.v.* «Yūnus» (B. Heller-[A.Rippin]), vol. 9, 2002, p. 347-349.

77 – A number of known figures have this name, and it is impossible to determine to which of these the present mention refers. Among them are the following: Muḥammad b. Ṯābit b. Qays al-Šammāš (see Abū Ǧaʿfar al-Ṭūsī, *Riǧāl al-šayḫ al-Ṭūsī*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1994, p. 82, no. 820-24); Muḥammad b. Ṯābit b. Abī Saʿd (see Aḥmad b. Abī ʿAbd Allāh al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-riǧāl*, Teheran, Teheran University Press, 1963, p. 20; Muḥammad b. Ṯābit b. Aslam (see *Riǧāl al-Ṭūsī*, p. 279, no. 4028-53); and Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥamzah Ṯābit b. Abī Ṣafiyyah al-Ṭumālī (see *Riǧāl al-Naǧāšī*, p. 358, no. 969).

78 – For more on imāms' knowledge of the language of the beasts see, for example J. Loebenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought: A Case-Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imām Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq", *Arabica* 52 (2003), p. 218. For tales in which the imāms demonstrate their ability to speak with beasts see, for example al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir al-daraǧāt*, p. 449, no. 8, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 47, p. 86-87, no. 84-86; p. 99-100, no. 1; Ibn Šahrāšūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 364; al-Rāwandī, *al-Ḫarāʾiǧ wa ʾl-ǧarāʾiḥ*, vol. 1, p. 299, part of no. 5; vol. 2, p. 616, no. 15; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir al-daraǧāt*, 344, no. 15, 345, no. 20; Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, p. 93.

79 – For more on this subject see: E. Kohlberg, "Some Shīʿī Views on Antediluvian World",

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recognized ʿAlī's right of succession, would have remained inside the whale's belly until the Day of Judgment.

This tradition demonstrates the importance of the creed of the Prophet's descendants' right of succession *(wilāyah)* in the Šīʿite faith; the Qurʾānic tale of Jonah and the whale is here given a new interpretation, in accordance with the Šīʿite belief that ʿAlī and his descendants are the rightful leaders of the Muslim community.[80]

The imāms' domed houses on the rivershore in Paradise

After its lightning journey the imām's boat docks on the shore of a great island, on which domed houses have been built for the Šīʿite imāms[81] (those who have already died as well as those who have yet to come to Paradise). Fāṭimah's[82]

SI, 52 (1980), p. 41-66.

80 – A number of tales are current among Šīʿites concerning pre-Islamic individuals and groups who were punished for their refusal to recognize ʿAlī's right of succession. Thus, for example, Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is explain as the result of his refusal to accept the Prophet's family's right of succession. For details see:al-ʿAyyāšī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāšī*, vol. 1, p. 41, no. 27. A strange tale relates that some people of Children of Israel were transformed into fish, lizards and mice because they had refused to recognized ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's right of succession (ibid., vol. 2, p. 35, no. 96). According to yet another tradition they were transformed into monkeys and pigs. For details see al Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, p. 244. For the same reason a number of prophets, among them Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David and Jacob, were punished as well. For details see Meir Bar-Asher, "Banū Isrāʾīl ka-anmāṭ awwaliyyah li-ʾl-shīʿa", *al-Karmal*, Haifa University, 18-19 (1997-8), p. 58-59, footnote no. 30.

81 – The reason why Šīʿite writers described the imāms' heavenly abodes as domed houses was quite likely because domes frequently crown sacred structures here on earth, including most mosques, even to this day. In Heaven, however, domes of various kinds are ubiquitous. There are domes for prophets, for imāms, for Fāṭimah, and for penitents. Thus, for example, penitents have domes in cities of light (see al-Mīrzā Ḥasan al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-wasāʾil*, Qumm, Muʾassasat āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṯ, 1988, vol. 12, p. 104, no. 13639-3; Tāǧ al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Šaʿīrī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-aḫbār*, Qumm, Dār al-Riḍā li-ʾl-Našr, 1984[2], p. 156-157. The domes in Heaven also come in a variety of colors and materials. Red, white and green domes are mentioned. Materials include rubies, pearls, musk, saffron and light. Thus, for example, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's domed house is white and made of pearls, while the Prophet's is red and made of rubies. Abrahams' is green and stands to the left of God's throne. The Prophet is reported as saying that on his journey to Heaven he saw domes made of red rubies and white pearls. For details see: al-Astarābādī, *Taʾwīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhirah*, p. 434; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 255; Ḥasan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *Aʿlām al-dīn fī ṣifat al-muʾminīn*, Qumma, Muʾassasat āl al-Bayt, 1987, p. 459; ʿAlī b. Ṭāwūs al-Ḥillī, *al-Yaqīn bi-ʾḫtiṣāṣ Mawlanā ʿAlī bi-ʾimrat al-muʾminīn*, Qumm, Muʾassasat Dār al-Kitāb, 1992, p. 291; al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*, vol. 2, p. 501; al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍāʾil al-šīʿah*, p. 37, no. 36.

82 – Fāṭimah's domed house is described at length in Šīʿite sources. The imām al-Ṣādiq, when asked about the reason for Fāṭima's epithet "al-Zahrāʾ" ("the radiant one"), said: "Because in Paradise she has a red ruby dome whose height is the equal of a year's journey, hanging in the air by God's might, with no supports underneath; it has one-hundred-thousand doors and a thousand angels at each door, which can be seen by all the denizens of Heaven, just as mortals can see the pearly, shining stars in the sky. Therefore the denizens of Heaven say: 'This is the

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dome is next to the Prophet Muḥammad's. The domes of the other prophets are all located in the most beautiful spots in Paradise. The domes are said to be made of white pearls. In each there is a bed, also made of white pearls, with a cover of silk brocade. The floor is covered with saffron and crumbs of musk and ambergris.[83] The dome is covered with purple drapes, surrounded by angels and decorated with golden chains. It is surrounded by trees. The Qurʾānic "verse of the chair"[84] is written on the entrance to each dome. Inside each dome there is a black-eyed girl.[85] ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's dome stands in the middle; it is made of white pearls[86] and is larger than all the other imāms' domes.[87]

The domed houses which are occupied by imāms are covered by a drape, while those that are as yet unoccupied are not; among the latter is the domed house of the twelfth imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, which is taller than all the others.[88]

When the imām al-Ṣādiq arrives with his companions at the island of the imāms' domes he asks them to disembark and greet the imāms in their domes.[89] They thus begin a visit of inspection. They start with ʿAlī's dome, raise the drape over the entrance, see ʿAlī sitting inside and greet him. After that they continue on to the domes of the other imāms, in order, beginning with al-ġasan b. ʿAlī, then on to al-Ḥusayn, and so on until they reach Muḥammad al-Bāqir. After they greet all the imāms there, the imām al-Ṣādiq asks his companions to look to the right side of the island, where they see domes without drapes, one of which will become the abode of al-Ṣādiq himself after his death. The dome of the twelfth imām stands in the middle of these. After this al-Ṣādiq and his companions return to the boat. The imām then addresses the boat as follows: "Be with God's power", and the party immediately finds itself back on earth, as they were before their journey.[90]

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radiant one' [i.e., Fāṭimah's radiant dome]". For more details see: Ibn Šahrāšūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 331.

83 – Al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 47, p. 159, quoting *ʿUyūn al-muʿǧizāt*.

84 – Q 2:255.

85 – The houris of Paradise would also seem to dwell in domed houses, whether with the imāms or in separate domes. Of the Prophet it is related that when he was taken on his night visit to Heaven he passed by a river whose banks were covered with coral domes. From the domes a call went up: "Peace be upon you, Messenger of God". The angel Gabrial asked: "Who are these?" and he answered: "These are black-eyed maidens. Ask their God to let them greet you". For more details see: al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, p. 107.

86 – Ibn Šahrāšūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 330, 334.

87 – Al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 47, p. 160, no. 227.

88 – There is a tradition that when the Twelfth imām will return to earth at the end of time, seven domes of light will descend on Kūfa, in one of which will be the imām, but no one will know in which. For details see: al-ʿAyyāšī, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāšī*, vol. 1, p. 103, nos. 301, 303.

89 – Ibn Šahrāšūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 334. According to some sources it is the imāms inside the domes who take the initiative and come out to greet and meet al-Ṣādiq and his companions, instead of the other way around. For details see: al-Nabāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 2, p. 133.

90 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 142.

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The depiction of Paradise in the account of this miraculous journey has clear connections to the Qurʾānic model, although the Šīʿite writers also weaved in numerous details that were derived from their own imaginations and hopes, as well as some that were certainly borrowed from folk legends, although the sanctity attached to the events themselves and to the imāms had the effect of distancing the story from such origins. Yet we can say with a great degree of confidence that Paradise as depicted by the Šīʿite writers here allowed them to in a way to gratify their concealed desires and repressed liberties; in other words, it is a compensatory construction, which also provides an imaginary answer to some questions about the afterlife. The purpose of traditions of this kind is to inculcate the idea of the imamate and to convince the Šīʿite believers that the imāms of the past are not dead but rather reside in the most beautiful parts of Paradise, in domed palaces built expressly for them. They are alive in Heaven, like the prophets, and imāms who are special in some way, for example the first imām, ʿAlī, or the last one, al-Mahdī, have abodes which reflect their status, larger in the case of the former, and taller in the case of the latter.

Dwellers of the sea and the seashore in the imāms' miracles

In the tales of miracles perfomed by the imāms on the sea the inhabitants of the sea and the seashore are of two kinds:

A. The imāms: in these stories the imāms live on the shore of a white sea, in domed houses built expressly for them.

B. The enemies of Shīʿism, who are tormented in Hell.

In some of the tales the imāms are said to evoke a black sea, under which their enemies reside. Thus, for example, it is told that Dāwūd b. Kaṯīr al-Raqqī[91] asked the imām al-Ṣādiq about the fate of the enemies of Shīʿīsm, whereupon the imām struck the ground with his cane, causing the earth to split. A black sea appeared, and in it were people with black faces and blue eyes. Every one of these people was chained to a rock and entrusted to the keeping of an angel. They all screamed and begged the Prophet Muḥammad to intercede on their

91 – A client of the Banū Asad, with epithets "Abū Ḫālid" and "Abū Sulaymān". He transmitted reports on the imāms Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Mūsà al-Kāẓim and ʿAlī al-Riḍā, and is the author of two books, *al-Mazār* and *al-Ihlīlaǧah*. He died after the year 200 AH, not long after the death of the imām al-Riḍā (d. 818 CE). For more details on him see Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-riǧāl*, Teheran, Teheran University Press, 1963, p. 146, no. 584, 452, no. 173; Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ġaḍāʾirī, *Riǧāl Ibn al-Ġaḍāʾirī*, Qumm, Muʾassasat Ismāʿīlyān, 1944², vol. 2, p. 290; Aḥmad b. Abī ʿAbd Allāh al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-Riǧāl*, Teheran, Teheran University Press, 1963, vol. 32, p. 47-48; Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Naǧāšī, *Riǧāl al- Naǧāšī*, ed. Muḥammad Ǧawād al-Nāǧīnī, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1986, p. 156, no. 410; al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Riǧāl al-ʿallāma al-Ḥillī*, Qumm, Dār al-Ḏaḫāʾir, 1963, p. 67, no. 1; Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Kiššī, *Iḫtiyār maʿrifat al-riǧāl*, also known as *Riǧāl al-Kiššī*, ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī, Mašhad:, Mashhad University Press, 1929, p. 402, nos. 750-407, 751-408, 765-766; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Riǧāl al-šayḫ al-Ṭūsī*, Teheran, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1944.

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behalf, but the angels beat their faces and said to them: "You lie, you have no Muḥammad".

Dāwūd was amazed at the scene and asked the imām who these people were. Al-Ṣādiq answered: These are Ibn al-Ğamal,[92] Zufar,[93] Naʿṯal[94] and "the accursed one".[95] He then added: "They will remain covered until the Day of Resurrection".[96]

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92 – Literally "son of the camel", a Šīʿite epithet for the Caliph Abū Bakr (ruled 632-634 CE).

93 – A derisive Šīʿite epithet for the Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb (d. 644). The Šīʿite explanation of the name is as follows: One whose good is unwanted and whose evil is not to be feared, one whose arrows are not resolute and who has no abode on the two earths, one who has no prestige and who is driven by carelessness (see al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 167, no. 23). The word "*zufar*" also means the first neigh of a donkey, and the sound of a fire being kindled. Thus the name may perhaps indicate a desire by the Šīʿites to compare ʿUmar's voice to that of a donkey, or to hint at his fated end in the fires of hell. For details see al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 54, p. 100.

94 – A derisive Šīʿite epithet for the Caliph ʿUṯmān b. ʿAffān (d. 656 CE). The name's origin is the subject of some debate. Here are some of the opinions on the matter: A. That it was the name of a young donkey belonging to a Jew in al-Madīnah. B. That it referred to an Egyptian (or a man from Khurasān) with a large beard. C. That it denoted a long-haired male hyena. D. That it meant a large, long-bearded billy goat. E. That the name was taken from that of a Yemeni Jew by the same name, who was also known by his epithet of Abū ʿUmāra. This man came to the Prophet and asked him about the attributes of God, the prophets and the imāms. The answers he received convinced him to convert to Islam, and on the occasion of his conversion he composed a nine-line poem which began thus: "The Exalted and Sublime one prayed for you, oh best of all mankind". For more on Naʿṯal the Jew, see ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Ḫazzāz al-Qummī, *Kifāyat al-aṯar fī ʾl-naṣṣ ʿalà al-aʾimmah al-iṯnay ʿašar*, Qumm, Dār Baydār liʾl-Našr, 1980, p. 11-16; al-Irbillī, *Kašf al-ġummah*, vol. 1, p. 479. In fact, it is quite unlikely that the Caliph's epithet originated with Naṯʿal the Jew, since the latter was a virtuous person who embraced Islam out of conviction, whereas the Šīʿites clearly intended their epithets for the Caliphs to bear pejorative connotations. Thus one or more of the first four meanings probably gave rise to the name. For details see: al-Nabāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 3, p. 30.

95 – "The accursed one" is a pejorative Šīʿite epithet which can stand for a number of different people to whom Shīʿism is hostile because of some wrong it committed. We do not know which of these is intended here. Below are some of the figures called "the accursed one" in the Shīʿte literature: the devil; Abū Lahab (ʿAbd al-ʿUzzà b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib) (d. 624 CE) (for details see Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakrī, *al-Anwār fī mawlid al-nabī Muḥammad*, Qumm, Dār al-Šarīf al-Raḍī, 1990, p. 312; Abū Ğahl (see *Tafsīr al-imām al-ʿAskarī*, p. 439; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ nahğ al-balāġah*, vol. 4, p. 65; al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 17, p. 246); ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mulğam (d. 661 CE) (see Ibn al-Baṭrīq [Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan al-Asadī al-Ḥillī], *ʿUmdat ʿuyūn ṣiḥāḥ al-aḫbār fī manāqib imām al-abrār*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1986, p. 29; al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ wa ʾl-aʾimmah*, p. 166; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ nahğ al-balāġah*, vol. 7, p. 93; al-Daylamī, *Iršād al-qulūb*, vol. 2, p. 435; ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Nabāṭī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 1, p. 242; al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 18, p. 304, no. 10; vol. 42, p. 18, 287; vol. 45, p. 229; vol. 75, p. 72); ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 664) (see Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Iḥtiğāğ*, Mašhad, Našr al-Murtaḍā, 1982, vol. 1, p. 276; al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 119); Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (ruled 661-680 CE) (see Naṣr b. Muzāḥim b. Sayyār al-Minqarī, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām M. Hārūn, Qumm, Maktabat āyat Allāh al-Marʿašī, 1982, p. 118; al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. ʿAlī b. Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī,

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The types of seas evoked by the imāms

In the tales of the imāms' sea miracles a number of different types of sea are mentioned, each with its own specific function. They are as follows.

A. *The sea which protects the imām from danger.*

One type of sea mentioned in tales of the imāms' miracles is one which serves as a barrier between the imām and his enemies, preventing the latter from taking him prisoner or killing him. The imām's action in this case is reminiscent of Moses, who cast his stick and split the sea; the imām, in fact, outdoes Moses in his miracle, since he prays on the water and does not sink in it. In this context it is told of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muʿtaḍid bi-Allāh[97] (ruled 892-902 CE) that he sent three of his men to arrest the imām Muḥammad al-Qāʾim[98] (occulted in 874 CE) at his home in the city of Sāmarrāʾ.[99] The Caliph's men broke into the imām's home and found themselves in front of a curtain. When they raised it

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Nahǧ al-ḥaqq wa kašf al-ṣidq, Qumm, Muʾassasat Dār al-Hiǧrah, 1986, p. 309; Abū al-Qāsim Ǧaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, al-Naǧaf, Dār al-Murtaḍawiyyah li-ʾl-Našr, 1977, p. 177; al-Mufīd, *al-Iḫtiṣāṣ*, p. 124; Sadīd al-Dīn Šāḏān b. Ǧibrāʾīl al-Qummī, *al-Faḍāʾil*, Qumm, Dār al-Raḍī, 1943[2], p. 77; Ibrāhīm ʿAlī al-Kafʿamī, *al-Balad al-amīn*, no place and no date, p. 271; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ nahǧ al-balāġah*, vol. 16, p. 44; Abū Ǧaʿfar al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahaǧǧid*, Beirut, Muʾassasat Fiqh al-Šīʿah, 1990, p. 293); the second Umayyad Caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah (ruled 680-683 CE) (for details see al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ wa ʾl-aʾimmah*, Qumm, Dār al-Šaraf al-Raḍī, 1834, p. 175; al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 287, no. 151; vol. 45, p. 96, 99, 273); Šamir b. Ḏī al-Ǧawšan al-Ḥabābī (d. 686 CE), who killed al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (see al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 55, 264); ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād (d. 686 CE) (see al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ wa ʾl-aʾimmah*, p. 177-178; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī, *Iʿlām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā*, Qumm, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1970[3], p. 226; al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 119; vol. 53, p. 20); ʿUmar b. Saʿd (d. 686 CE) (see al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ wa ʾl-aʾimmah*, p. 177); al-Aḫnas b. Šarīq (d. 683 CE), a well-known dissembler (see Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ nahǧ al-balāġah*, vol. 8, p. 301); the Abbasid Caliph al-Maʾmūn (ruled 813-833 CE), whom Šīʿite accuse of having poisoned the imām al-Riḍā (see al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ wa ʾl-aʾimmah*, p. 175; al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 27, p. 344; vol. 30, p. 287, no. 151; vol. 42, p. 296; vol. 45, p. 96, 99, 273); the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (ruled 847-861 CE), who was called "the accursed one" because he ordered the tomb of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī in Karbalāʾ to be plowed (see al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 404); Pharaoh, because he mistreated his subjects (see Nūr Allāh al-Šuštarī, *al-Ṣawārim al-muḥriqah fī naqd al-ṣawāʿiq al-muḥriqah*, ed. Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī, Teheran, Maṭbaʿat al-Nahḍah, 1947, p. 269).

96 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 142-143.

97 – The sixteenth Abbasid Caliph; for details on him see *EI*[2], *s.v.* «Al-Muʿtaḍid Bi-ʾLāh» (E. Lévi-Provençal), vol. 7, 1993, p. 760-761.

98 – The twelfth imām; for details on him see *EI*[2], *s.v.* «Muḥammad al-Kāʾim» (J.G.J Ter Haar), vol. 7, 1993, p. 443.

99 – A city on the east bank of the Tigris, 118 km north of Baghdad. It was built by the Abbasid Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim bi-Allāh (ruled 833-842 CE). See *EI*[2], *s.v.* «Sāmarrāʾ» (A. Northedge), vol. 8, 1995, p. 1041.

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they saw a broad sea at the other end of which the imām sat in prayer on a mat which hovered over the water and did not sink; the imām paid no attention to the Caliph's men.

One of the attackers, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh by name, tried to approach the imām and arrest him, but he nearly drowned and only managed to extricate himself with difficulty. Another man then repeated the attempt, which also failed, whereupon all three asked the imām to forgive them and to ask for God's forgiveness on their behalf as well. They then returned to the Caliph and informed him of what had happened. Al-Muʿtaḍid was filled with wonder and asked the men not to divulge the incident.[100]

This type of tale aroused the Šīʿite believer's dread and wonder. The sea in this miracle plays the role of a haven for the imām, protecting him from his enemies who, if they try to harm him, are in danger of drowning. Perhaps we are also meant to understand that perhaps the imām affected his enemies' vision, so that they only thought they were seeing him praying over the water; this is quite possible, since in the Šīʿite view an imām can make people see what he wants.[101] This tale also shows that the imām is deemed capable of supernatural acts in general, such as floating in the air above the water.[102] The performance of such miracles proves to the believer that the person claiming to be an imām is indeed what he claims to be, since he does things which are beyond the ability of other mortals.

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100 – For details see al-Rāwandī, *al-Ḫarāʾiġ wa ʾl-ǧarāʾiḥ*, vol. 1, p. 460-461, whence Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraǧ al-mahmūm*, p. 248; ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Nīlī al-Naǧafī, *Muntaḫab al-anwār al-muḍīʾah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Kūhakmarī, Qumm, Maṭbaʿat al-Ḫayyām, 1980, p. 140-141; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ġaybah*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiyyah, 1990, p. 249-250, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 52, p. 51-52, no. 36; al-Irbillī, *Kašf al-ġummah*, vol. 2, p. 499-500; Hāšim al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿāǧiz*, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiyyah, 1992, vol. 8, p. 65-67.

101 – For more details on the power of imāms to affect what others see, see for example E. Kolhberg, "Vision and the Imams", p. 125-157.

102 – Praying and walking on water are abilities which are not ascribed only to imāms. Sunnī sources tell of a number of the Prophet's Companions who also walked on water, as did some ṣūfī saints, who also prayed on water without sinking or even getting wet. Thus it is related of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. 675 CE) that he and his troops walked on the Tigris river and crossed it just before the battle of al-Qādisiyyah in the year 16 AH (see Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl al-Nabahānī, *Ǧāmiʿ karāmāt al-awliyāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿIzzat al-Bayyūmī, Cairo, al-Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyyah, n.d., vol. 1, p. 141-142). Another tale reports that Abū Hurayrah (d. 679 CE) and ʿAlāʾ b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 642 CE) walked together on the surface of the sea (ibid., vol. 1, p. 153-154). Yet another tale of this kind relates the Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Būlāqī, an eminent ṣūfī, walked on the sea, stopped a boat whose sailors had kidnapped a child and returned the child to its mother safe and sound (ibid., vol. 1, p. 175). As for people who are reported to have prayed above water, one such was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sayyid Ḥamdawayh, also known as al-Muʿallim Abū Bakr al-Taymī. It is related that he spread his cloak over a pool and prayed. After he finished his prayer he picked up his cloak without getting wet (ibid., vol. 1, p. 173).

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Fear of the authorities would appear to have been one of the stimuli for this miracle. The issue of the imāms' relations with the political authorities has always been a sensitive point among Šīʿites.

B. *The sea as the abode of the hidden imām*

One of the seas which an imām may evoke is located under the earth. On the shores of this sea ride two horsemen who place their beards on their saddlebows.[103] Both horsemen are supporters of the twelfth imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī (occulted in 874 CE).[104] We encounter this sea in a report by Abū Baṣīr,[105] who relates: "Once when I was with the imām Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq] there was a man from Khurasān present, who spoke to him in a language which I did not understand. During their conversation the imām al-Ṣādiq stomped on the ground with his foot, and there I saw a sea under the earth.[106] In this miracle the function of the sea is apparently to indicate the abode of the twelfth imām, whose spirit is preserved in that sea, on whose shore the two horsemen[107] keep guard and await the imām's return.

With tales of this kind Shīʿte writers inculcate the idea of the las imām's occultation and his eventual return at the end of time.

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103 – The two horsemen would appear to serve as guards of the hidden imām's home. In the manner of imāms and the Prophet Muḥammad they ride mounts. Whenever the mount, usually an donkey, would strut about in self-importance, they would put their heads on the saddlebow as a mark of humility. This is what the Prophet did, too, when he rode his donkey ʿUfayr (or Yaʿfūr), and the Šīʿite imāms followed his custom. For details see the author's paper, Kh. Sindawi, "The Prophet's Ass in Shīʿite Tradition", *Al-Masaq*, 18 (2006), p. 87-98.

104 – For details about him see *EI*², *s.v.* «Muhammad al-Ḳā'im» (G.J. Ter Haar), vol. 7, 1993, p. 443.

105 – Four known figures were given the agnomen Abū Baṣīr: Layṯ b. al-Baḫtarī al-Murādī, Yaḥyà b. Abī Qāsim, Yūsuf b. al-Ḥāriṯ, and ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Asadī. See *Riǧāl al-Ḥilli*, p. 392-393; *Riǧāl Ibn Dāwūd*, p. 393, nos. 7-9. Since all four transmitted traditions in the imām al-Ṣādiq's name it is impossible to determine which one is meant here.

106 – Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-imāmah*, 245, whence al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿāǧiz*, vol. 6, p. 185, no. 1916:346; al-Mufīd, *al-Iḫtiṣāṣ*, p. 325, whence al-Mağlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 47, p. 89, no. 94.

107 – The hidden's imām's home, according to Šīʿite tradition, appears to be permanently protected by two guards, humans or wild beasts such as tigers and lions. Thus, for example, the Šīʿite sect known as the Ḥanafiyyah (or the Kaysāniyyah) believes that the hidden imām is Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyyah (d. 700 CE), who went into hiding in a cave on Mt. Raḍwā near al-Madīnah. He is said to have provisions of water and honey, and two guards, a lion on his right and a tiger on his left, protect him until the time will come for him to return. According to other traditions the guards are a pair of lions or a pair of tigers. Yet another tradition mentions two tigers and a lion, and there is also a tradition that just mentions lions and tigers in the plural, without a specific number (see Widād al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysāniyyah fī al-tārīḫ wa 'l-adab*, Beirut, 1974, p. 180-181). I. Friedlander is of the opinion that Shīʿism has been influenced by the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (11:6-9), see "The Heterodoxies of the Shi'ite in the Presentationof Ibn Ḥazm", *JAOS*, 29 (1909), p. 37-38.

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C. *The black sea*[108]

Among the seas which the imāms conjure is one that is black. It is populated by the suffering black-faced and blue-eyed enemies of Shīʿism.[109]

The shores of the white sea in Paradise is lined with the homes of the righteous, while the black sea is in hell. Under it the enemies of Shīʿism suffer there in the interval between their death and their resurrection on the Day of Judgment.

The sea is black, in allusion to the black character of its denizens, who are malicious sinners. The black color may also have been chosen by Šīʿite writers in order to frighten and deter people from showing hostility towards Shīʿism. The features of the sea have apparently been taken from depictions of the Valley of Barahūt;[110] in fact, the black sea may actually have been identified with that valley. The valley is described as the most evil on the face of the earth and as belonging to hell.[111] It is a dark valley, located in the Ḥaḍramawt region of Yemen. It is the hottest valley on earth, and is populated by the spirits of non-believers, which meet at dawn and return to the fire in the evening; they are doomed to remain so until the Day of Resurrection.[112]

Conclusion

God provided the imāms with a sea for their journey from earth to Paradise; He granted the power to evoke it whenver they wished. The main objective of this idea is to further the Šīʿite cause and the idea that the Šīʿite imāms possess the right of succession to the leadership of the Muslim community. The maritime miracles performed by the Shīʿīte imāms are meant to provide proof of their

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108 – The black sea here is an imaginary sea of Šīʿite lore, with no connection to the Black Sea in south-eastern Europe.

109 – See the story of Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Dāwūd b. Kaṯīr al-Raqqī above, in the section entitled "Dwellers of the sea and the seashore in the imāms' miracles", and footnotes 91-96 there.

110 – According to a number of sources Barahūt is a deep well whose bottom cannot be reached. See al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 57, p. 206, no. 4.

111 – Some Šīʿite sources maintain that Barahūt is the road to hell.

112 – For more on the Valley of Barahūt see *EI*², *s.v.* «Barahūt» (G. Rentz), vol. 1, 1960, p. 1045; al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*, p. 322; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir al-daraǧāt*, p. 404, no. 3; al-Astarābādī, *Taʾwīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhirah*, p. 196; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāmah*, p. 101; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 246, nos. 3-5, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 6:289, nos. 11-12; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, p. 386, no. 3; Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl ʿan āl al-rasūl*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ġaffārī, Qumm, Muʾassasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1983³, 228, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 33, p. 238, no. 518; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Ḫiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 440, no. 33; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Šarāʾiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 595; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Aštaṭ al-Kūfī, *al-Ǧaʿfariyyāt*, or *al-Aš*ʿ*aṯiyyāt*, Teheran, Maktabat Naynawā al-Ḥadīṯah, n.d., p. 190; al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, vol. 2, p. 573, no. 18; al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn aḫbār al-riḍā*, ed. Mahdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Lāǧūrdī, Teheran, Dār al-ʿĀlam li-ʾl-Našr (Ǧihān), 1958, vol. 1, p. 244, whence al-Maǧlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 8, p. 268, no. 14; al-Ǧazāʾirī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, p. 258; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-šīʿah*, Qumm, Muʾassasat āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṯ, 1989, vol. 25, p. 260, chap. 16, no. 31860; al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-wasāʾil*, vol. 17, p. 18, chap. 13.

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standing for their companions as well as for those who doubt their powers. God, the Creator of everything, including the sea, has put the latter under the imāms' control in order to demonstrate their right to the imamate.

The sea as an element in the miracles performed by Šīʿite imāms serves a religious and ideological function. Šīʿite writers used it to show that an imām can freely travel beyond the bounds of the earth, and that the limitations imposed on mere mortals do not apply to him. Indeed, he can also free his companions on his sea journey from these same limitations.

Since the sea here serves a purely religious function, Šīʿite writers on the subject naturally did not deal with technical issues of boat navigation, or the time the journey took. These were unimportant facts in a story whose main purpose was to present the imāms' island in Paradise.

The sea itself and the miracles performed on it, as part of this story, functioned as a means which Šīʿite writers used to demonstrate the imāms' powers; they had control of the sea, crossed it in literally no time at all, and used it to travel from the earth to Paradise.

As we saw at the outset of the present study, the sea among Arabs and Muslims aroused fear and sea travel was considered dangerous. In the imām's case, however, the sea is subservient to him, and as a result it is beautiful and calm. Šīʿite writers obviously took pride, albeit indirectly, in describing their imāms' maritime journeys, their control of the sea and their ability to evoke it whenever they so desired.

The imāms' connections with the sea are of several different kinds:

A. The sea connects the imāms with the imāms' islands in Paradise; it is the place where the human and the divine worlds meet, so that the living imām and his companions can encounter the imāms who are already in Paradise.
B. The sea is a safe place where the imām is protected from his enemies.
C. The sea is where the enemies of Shīʿism are punished.
D. The sea is the dwelling place of the hidden imām.

The sea in tales of the imāms' miracles thus possesses a double character. It is both fantastic and realistic. In other words, it possesses real attributes, such as boats, water, islands, and fish. But at the same time it is also a place of supernatural wonders and miracles.

An imām's maritime miracle can be perfomed in the sea, on the surface, on the shore, on an island, or underneath the sea. Whatever the exact location of the miracle, the sea plays an important role in Šīʿite miracles and their main objective, of convincing those who doubt the imām's powers and authority.

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